

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a federal earmark?

Each year, Congress must pass legislation appropriating funding for the entire federal government (excluding entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare). These bills, known as appropriations bills, determine how much funding each program receives in a given year. An earmark is a provision inserted into an appropriations bill by a Member of Congress to specifically designate funds within that legislation for a project in their district.

How is an earmark different from traditional program funding (i.e., Section 330 funding via HRSA)?

Both the House and the Senate consider Section 330 funding and other programs through the traditional committee process. Committees determine overall funding levels and can also order changes within the program. Typically, House and Senate negotiators will later meet to determine a level of funding that is acceptable to both sides.

Earmarks are not voted on or considered through the committee process. Instead, earmarks are typically inserted into legislation just before it is considered for a final vote. Once the final version of an appropriations bill comes up for a vote, Members of Congress must decide whether to support or vote against the entire bill.

How do Members of Congress decide which projects receive funding?

Members of Congress receive numerous requests each year for earmarked funding. After receiving a rough estimate of how much funding they can insert into each bill, Members decide which projects in their district should be funded.

Although there is a very formal process for applying for these funds, there is no formal competition. Members decide which projects to fund based on a wide variety of factors including, but not limited to: quality of the application, quality of relationship with applicant, previous receipt of funding, demonstrated ability to use funds wisely, perceived geographic or socioeconomic needs, and political considerations.

How can a Health center determine its chances of receiving an earmark?

Getting an earmark request inserted into legislation takes plenty of planning, preparation, and lobbying. Members of Congress receive only a finite amount of funding to award each year and most receive dozens of requests. Each Member of Congress receives different amounts of funding and each has a unique method of choosing which projects are worthy of their support, time and money in pursuing an earmark. For example, Senator McCain of Arizona does not award earmarks at all. On the other hand, Senator Byrd, Ranking Member of the Appropriations Committee, earmarks millions for West Virginia each year. Last year, he secured more than \$13 million in health facilities funding! Health center success depends on how much overall funding is available as well as the quality of their proposal and the ability to build relationships with Members of Congress and their staff. Each center's chances will vary widely depending on the politics and experience of their Congressional delegation. We encourage health centers to take advantage of Capital Link's *Federal Strategy Assessment (FSA)*. The *FSA* reviews historical trends, analyzes the likely strengths and weaknesses of your application, and makes recommendations about next steps. As health center allies, we can offer an honest appraisal of your situation before you invest.

Health Facilities Earmarks Frequently Asked Questions

How much money can a health center receive?

Funding amounts vary widely, but can be relatively large. In FY10, awards ranged from \$100,000 to \$1.5 million. The average award was \$441,000. 55 health centers and Primary Care Associations received earmarks last year.

Will earmarks be affected by federal deficits?

Growing budget deficits will force Congress to make tough decisions to restrain spending in the FY11 budget and beyond. Although the overall budget picture will prevent continued dramatic growth in earmark programs, it is certain that earmarks for health facilities will continue into the future for two reasons. First, health care capital costs continue to grow nationwide and Congress faces enormous political pressure from providers to respond. Second, earmarks provide enormous political benefits to Members of Congress. The 2010 elections will also ensure that both Republicans and Democrats will be eager to fund projects back home.

How can Capital Link help?

Capital Link can help health centers through all stages of the earmark process:

1. We work with health centers to complete a *Federal Strategy Assessment (FSA)*. The *FSA* reviews historical trends, analyzes the likely strengths and weaknesses of your application, and makes recommendations about next steps. It also includes a timeline for action and a summary of the time and costs required to move forward.
2. Capital Link works with health centers to create a federal earmark proposal featuring diversified funding streams, a clearly defined federal role, as well as a description of the decisive economic and health impact of federal investment. Each proposal is uniquely tailored toward each Member of Congress and reflects each health center's unique political strategy.
3. Capital Link also assists centers through the earmark submission and application process and assists with all congressional meetings and site visits.
4. Finally, Capital Link's appropriations services come with complete project tracking including the monitoring of formal activities (submission of requests, meetings, visits) as well as informal activities (thank you notes, phone calls).

Does a health center need to hire consultants to pursue an earmark?

Each health center has to make this decision for itself. Many health centers have tried to pursue their own earmarks. While some have succeeded, others have been promised a great deal from their Congressperson only to find that hospitals and other priorities received funding at the end of the budget year. Health centers that have taken advantage of outside assistance have performed better than those who have tried to navigate the process alone. Ultimately, the biggest determinants of success will be your relationships with Members of Congress, their ability to deliver funding, the quality of your proposal, and your own ability to meet the bureaucratic hurdles throughout the process in a timely fashion. We strongly recommend a Capital Link "*Federal Strategy Assessment*" (FSA) to help you decide on next steps.

Contact us for a consultation:

www.caplink.org/consultation